

Incidence of Non-Fatal Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in California, 1998-1999

Laura E. Lund, M.A.

Violence between intimate partners is a serious criminal justice and public health problem. Nationally, women and men reported being violently victimized by their intimate partners about 1 million times in 1998.¹

Intimate partners perpetrate more than 20 percent of violent assaults against women.² In 1994, more than 200,000 female assault victims visited U.S. emergency departments for treatment of injuries inflicted by intimates.³ According to the California Attorney General's Office, there were 56,000 arrests for domestic violence in California in 1998.⁴ During the same year, there were nearly 200,000 calls to report domestic violence situations. The health consequences of physical and psychological violence between intimates can be significant and long lasting.⁵

California's commitment to preventing violence against women makes it important for us to understand more about this problem. This report aims to illuminate this serious public health issue. We examined data from the California Women's Health Survey (CWHs), seeking to answer several questions:

- How many women in California are victims of intimate partner physical violence (IPPV) each year? (See "Data and Methods" section of this report for details on how IPPV was defined.)
- How many California women are victims of minor IPPV, and how many are victims of severe IPPV?
- Are there differences in the likelihood that a California woman will be an IPPV victim according to her age, race, or household income?

Findings

In the table on the next page, we see that nearly 6 percent of California's adult female population, more than 620,000 women, experienced at least one act of IPPV in the year before the survey. About 40 percent

of these women, or more than 250,000, experienced severe physical violence.

Age. Women aged 18-44 were more likely to experience both minor and severe violence compared to older women. They were four times more likely to experience severe violence and four and a half times more likely to experience any type of violence compared to women aged 45 and older. We found that 8.7 percent of women under age 45 experienced IPPV. This means that more than 525,000 California women in this age group were victims of one or more acts of intimate partner violence each year. More than 40 percent of these women, about 212,000 annually, experienced severe IPPV. Among women aged 45 and older, 2 percent, or more than 95,000 women, were victims of any type of IPPV each year. Nearly half of these older women experienced severe IPPV.

Race. Black women were more likely than white, Hispanic, or Asian/Pacific Islander/other women to experience both minor and severe IPPV. They were 1.3 times more likely to report any physical violence compared to Hispanic women, 2.1 times more likely to report any physical violence compared to Asian/Pacific Islander/other women, and 2.6 times more likely to report any physical violence compared to white women. However, because of the differences in the relative sizes of these race groups in the population, white women were the largest category of IPPV victims, with more than 250,000 experiencing any violence each year. Hispanic women were the next largest group of victims, followed by black women and Asian/Pacific Islander/other women.

Income. We found that the poorest women, those reporting annual household incomes less than \$15,000, were at increased risk for minor and severe IPPV

Respondent characteristics	% reporting victimization within past year	# of California women affected per year
Minor physical violence¹		
TOTAL	5.5	587,575
AGE		
18-44	8.2	500,958
45+	1.9	86,617
RACE		
Black	10.2	76,796
Hispanic	7.9	208,914
White	4.0	245,610
Asian/Pacific Islander/Other	4.5	56,255
INCOME		
<\$15,000	8.6	182,142
\$15,000 plus	4.8	376,012
Serious physical violence²		
TOTAL	2.4	256,612
AGE		
18-44	3.5	212,909
45+	0.9	43,703
RACE		
Black	5.5	41,079
Hispanic	3.6	93,652
White	1.5	88,972
Asian/Pacific Islander/Other	2.6	32,908
INCOME		
<\$15,000	4.8	101,199
\$15,000 plus	1.8	145,653
All physical violence³		
TOTAL	5.8	621,323
AGE		
18-44	8.7	525,594
45+	2.0	95,729
RACE		
Black	11.0	82,373
Hispanic	8.3	218,418
White	4.2	255,118
Asian/Pacific Islander/Other	5.2	65,413
INCOME		
<\$15,000	8.9	187,676
\$15,000 plus	5.1	404,225

Source: California Women's Health Survey
Prepared by the California Department of Health Services, EPIC Branch

¹ Minor violence includes being pushed, grabbed, shoved, or slapped on at least one occasion within the past year.

² Serious violence includes being kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit or victim of an attempt to be hit with something, beaten up, choked, threatened with a knife or gun, or being the victim of a knife or gun assault on at least one occasion within the past year.

³ Includes both minor and serious physical violence.

compared to higher income women. In fact, the poorest women were 1.7 times more likely to experience any type of IPPV compared to higher income women. However, because there are far more women in California's population with household incomes above \$15,000, they make up the majority of victims. According to the CWHS findings, about 187,000 women with annual household incomes of less than \$15,000 experienced at least one incident of violence each year, with more than half experiencing at least one incident of severe violence. About 400,000 women with household incomes above \$15,000 were victims of IPPV each year, with about 40 percent experiencing at least one incident of severe violence.

Discussion

The CWHS is the first population-based survey to provide information on the number of California women affected by IPPV. We found that in 1998 and 1999 a large number of California women, nearly 6 percent annually, experienced some form of physical violence at the hands of their intimate partners. Many of these women were the victims of severe violence. National studies give a wide range of estimates of the annual incidence of physical violence against women, from 0.75 percent among women aged 12 and older⁶ to 1.3 percent of women 18 and older⁷ to 12 percent of married or cohabiting women.⁸ Due to differences in question wording and survey design, it is not possible to make direct comparisons from the CWHS findings to these national figures. However, there is strong support in the national data for the California findings that young women, black women, and the poorest women are at increased risk for IPPV. Most of the behaviors classified as severe violence in this report (e.g., being punched, kicked, beaten up, assaulted with a knife or a gun) have the potential to lead to serious injury and even death. The finding that more than 250,000 women each year in California are victims of severe violence represents a potentially significant injury burden in the state. As mentioned previously, national data on the number of IPPV injuries suggest that about 200,000 women each year seek emergency department treatment for injuries inflicted by an intimate partner. Based on these data and California's population size, we

estimate that 25,000 or more women each year seek emergency department care for their IPPV injuries in our state.

Minor IPPV is much more common than severe IPPV, severe IPPV is more common than injuries resulting from IPPV, and deaths are the least common IPPV phenomenon. Our data suggest that each year in California there are:

- 588,000 incidents of minor IPPV against women
- 257,000 incidents of severe IPPV against women
- 25,000 ED visits by women for treatment of IPPV injuries (estimated, see above)
- 137 female-victim IPPV homicides (California Department of Justice, Homicide Datafile)

It is of particular concern that women under age 45 are at high risk for IPPV victimization. Because these women are in the age group most likely to be pregnant or to have young children living in the home, IPPV among these women is likely to have harmful, long-term consequences for children who witness or are also victims of family violence. The high rate of IPPV among women in the lowest income group also raises concerns about their ability to obtain appropriate health care for treatment of injuries and other health problems resulting from IPPV.

Limitations

This report deals only with physical violence between intimate partners. Psychological abuse is also highly prevalent, and can have adverse effects on quality of life, as well as lead to serious chronic physical and mental health conditions.⁵ More research is needed to determine the amount and severity of psychological abuse perpetrated against women by their intimate partners.

The CWSHS is a representative random sample of women aged 18 years and older living in California households with telephones. The survey does not ask questions of women under age 18, those living in households without telephones, or those who are institutionalized (e.g., living in nursing homes, prisons, or dormitories). Women who refused to

answer the IPPV module may be different in many ways from those who chose to participate. Because the survey does not include male respondents we are unable to determine the number of men in California affected by IPPV. Despite these limitations, our study provides the best available estimates of the incidence of minor and severe IPPV against women in California.

Conclusions

- Each year nearly 6 percent of adult California women, more than 620,000, experience some form of physical violence perpetrated by their intimate partners.
- Annually more than 250,000 California women are victims of severe violence, with the potential for serious injury or death.
- Black women, women under age 45, and women with household incomes under \$15,000 per year are at significantly increased risk for being victims of intimate partner physical violence.

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Data and Methods

Data

We examined data from the CWHs for a 19-month period, June 1, 1998 through December 31, 1999. The CWHs is an ongoing statewide telephone survey, providing a representative random sample of women aged 18 and older living in households with telephones in California. Respondents answer a wide variety of questions on health-related beliefs and behaviors. Beginning in June 1998, the CWHs added a module of questions ("IPPV module") asking women about their personal experiences with intimate partner violence. Respondents were told that they were going to be asked questions about how couples resolve problems and conflicts, and that "couple" could refer to having a current or former husband, partner, boyfriend or girlfriend.

Before analyzing the data, we applied a standard statistical weighting procedure to make certain that the sample accurately represents the actual California population in 1998. This helps ensure that our results truly represent all California women's answers and not just those who happened to be interviewed. In this report, we included only the population estimates based on the sample responses. We did not include respondents who stated that the questions did not apply to them because they had no current or former intimate partner during the 12 months before the survey. We also did not include respondents who refused to complete the IPPV module. There were 8,169 CWHs respondents during this time period, with 7,295 meeting the eligibility criteria for our study.

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This study includes data collected by the State of California Women's Health Survey (CWHs). The CWHs is coordinated by the California Department of Health Services in collaboration with the California Departments of Mental Health, Social Services and Alcohol and Drug Programs, and the CMRI (California Medical Review, Inc.).

Methods

The CWHs IPPV module asked a series of questions to find out what kinds of violent acts the respondent may have experienced at the hands of an intimate partner. This series of questions is based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS).⁹ In our analysis we divided these questions into two types of violent acts: "minor" and "severe," following the classification used by the developers of the CTS. We considered respondents to be victims of minor violence if they reported being pushed, grabbed, shoved or slapped on at least one occasion within the 12 months preceding the interview. We considered respondents to be victims of severe violence if they reported that on at least one occasion they were kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with an object, beaten up, choked, threatened with a knife or gun, or assaulted by a perpetrator using a knife or gun. We also considered incidents in which the perpetrator attempted to hit the victim with an object to be severe violence.

We used four race/ethnicity groupings ("race") in this analysis: non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander/other. There were too few respondents in this last group to analyze as separate race categories.

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